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WHERE DOES PSYCHOANALYSIS GO?

“Psychoanalysis as pathway” (*Psicoanalisi come percorso*) is the latest book by Franco Borgogno, an Italian psychoanalyst, secretary of the training of the SPI Institute in Milan (the SPI is one of the Italian member societies of I.P.A.), and professor of Clinical psychology at the University of Turin. It consists of 12 papers written between 1981 and 1999, covering the period during which the author passed from the position of analyzand to the one of training analyst. This personal “pathway” permits us to glimpse the type of movement, which, in spite of being written as a book of history of psychoanalysis, remains essentially interested in finding the analytic factors that promote a change in the structure of a mind. At the same time, this “analytic” filter produces a new way of reading the history of psychoanalysis which, instead of being based on the traditional factors – such as the conflicts within the movement, the lives of the authors, the progress of the theories, or the advancement in the technique – assumes history as the place where the concrete traces of the process of transformation of the mind can be found.

Borgogno argues that this process is especially rejected in the stories of three authors: Paula Heimann, Wilfred Bion, and Sándor Ferenczi, all of which were at odds with the psychoanalytic institution. This might make the reader wonder if such a conflict is a necessary element of change. In a way, Borgogno presents it as unavoidable, since the establishment “patronizes what exists creating dependency from it, and is driven to discard what is new and unknown, and every hypothesis which does not fit with it, by rejecting it” (p. 32), while, evidently, no progression can exist without departing from what is known. Yet, something which is outside of the individual is also necessary for the thought to progress, since – as Freud said, recommending Joan Riviere to write down her thoughts – thoughts can become independent only when they are expressed in a public form. The problem, therefore, is how we see the relationship between an individual who is trying to express his new thoughts and this external element. According to Borgogno, what one needs is “a group ... or at least another person, who accepts them, and considers them without reservation when they are in the process of being formulated” (p. 32). Here Borgogno recalls what Winnicott wrote to Melanie Klein, in 1952, after having expressed his own “new thoughts”: he would have wished to receive from Melanie Klein at least a sign, a hint, because, in that moment, what he needed was to feel that someone else was supportive. As Winnicott wrote in the same letter, the point is that the expression of a new thought can take place only in a state of mind characterized by an enhanced vulnerability, and therefore one needs not only someone else, but someone who is capable of listening without exerting a judging and limitations.

This situation is not very distant from the analytic one, for the patient is in a similar state of vulnerability when he has to express his thoughts in relation to the analyst – to the patient’s necessary “other”. For the analyst, to perceive this vulnerability means being capable of putting himself in the place of the patient, understanding that, in order to conform to the analyst’s expectations, the patient’s drive to submission might indeed be so strong as to imply the renunciation of more or less extended parts of his own personality. This capacity of perceiving the patient’s vulnerability corresponds to a state of mind of “reciprocity”, which is a necessary element of the analytic attitude. It permits, for instance, the analyst

to prospect the therapeutic work as a “meeting of minds”, in which the analyst’s mind is a mind trained “to give hospitality to and enabling the existence and development of the one of the patient in an atmosphere of aid, sincerity, and solidarity” (p. 62).

In a way, Borgogno seems to say that being an analyst is to keep alive the condition of analysand—and first of all the analyst’s private condition of analysand, which is so easily repressed by the illusion of knowing, once the ex-analysand finds himself in the analyst’s place. However, such a keeping alive is not a simple one since, by going upstream, it has to depart from and even fight against common sense. This ordinary sense corresponds to the previously outlined direction from the condition of analysand to the one of analyst. Yet, if the analyst has to keep alive the condition of patient, the “pathway” of psychoanalysis which is here in question, appears to have a backward direction: this is the “map” with which Borgogno scans the field of history.

In the case of Paula Heimann, her “advancement” meant to recoil from her identification with Melanie Klein—and from her position of “crown princess”—finding the courage to be herself and to reconsider those ideas and experiences that she discarded, in order to conform herself to the establishment’s beliefs and jargon. More precisely, her peculiar backward pathway is described by the author as a recoiling from the initial view of psychoanalysis as an inquiry, which takes place in the patient, to the idea that psychoanalysis is an exploration with the patient, to the final assumption that it consisted in a search for the patient.

Heimann’s understanding of the analyst’s emotional response changed accordingly, since this response, which was initially represented as the tool of an exact knowledge, progressively became the sensible means of an encounter. Along the way, she also abandoned a strong notion of interpretation, becoming convinced that the working alliance between analyst and patient could be more easily destroyed by the “too brilliant” interpretation of the analyst, than by the patient’s envy (p.79)—as it was postulated in the Kleinian perspective. Moreover, instead of restraining herself to the classic “levare”, as suggested by Freud, Paula Heimann came to see the analyst as operating “per via di porre”, i.e., showing, inviting, sustaining, creating, and so on (p. 84). For instance, she permitted herself to think aloud, thus enabling the patient to share her thoughts. A side effect of this experience was to show that the analyst did not consider himself omniscient. The more active stance was not used for invading the scene but, on the contrary, for liberating it from the inhibiting presence of the omnipotent analyst, enabling the patient to take full possession of the analytic space. Paula Heimann’s “pathway” was thus essentially a recoiling from the scene, which becomes especially meaningful when we consider its connection with the story of her life. “Every author”, writes Borgogno, “hides behind what he/she claims and the issues he/she deals a life episode, a private and painful secret, which he/she tries to work out” (p. 71). Paula’s life episode was probably to be born short after the death of a sister, so to replace her accordingly to the desire of her depressed mother.

This situation was later repeated in her analytic (and extra-analytic!) relationship with Melanie Klein, who used her instrumentally to her own desires of power and fights, with the sole difference that, while Paula’s mother showed at least gratitude to the daughter, Melanie Klein was so interested in herself, that she “never acknowledged her part in the events which characterized their relationship” (p. 72). This situation also explains why Paula Heimann became more and more sensitive to the unconscious identification with actual aspects of caregivers, such as their faults and depriving functions. Significantly she elaborated a different understanding of the internal objects, based on the idea that alien incorporative

processes can be forced into the child from outside, while lively elements and healthy areas are simultaneously pulled out. A “spoilt child” might well be the product of an environmental impingement of this type, resulting in the fact that the internal space is experienced as filled with strange and alien elements (pp. 100– 101). Here the situation is not very distant from Bion’s notion of the child who incorporates an envious breast, which robs and spoils the communications of meaning.

In the story of Bion we find a “pathway” which is again intertwined with taking leaves from the Kleinian group, after having been a “champion” of the group’s orthodoxy. This stepping out is rejected, among other things, in a different understanding of the analyst’s interpretative function. As Donald Meltzer has pointed out, the “first” Bion, the one who sticks to the Kleinian credo, is an author who produces a sort of distancing coldness that frustrates the desire to understand and encounter him – creating inferiority and discomfort in the audience, (p. 131). In contrast, the “second” Bion, the one that comes out especially from the *Cogitations*, abandons the lofty idea that the analyst possesses an exact knowledge of what the patient has in mind, embracing the view that, all what he can do, is to come closer to the patient in order to help him understand himself. In the new perspective, the interpretation does not say what or who the patient is, but can support, encourage, and facilitate the potential knowledge, which already lies dormant within the patient. Being oriented toward the future, the interpretation becomes “evocative”: although the patient does not know more than the analyst does, the kernel of what he will be is to be found within himself, and it is this kernel, which represents the patient’s “future”, that the reverie of the analyst might and should come in touch with (p. 118).

According to Bion, the mind is relational rather than intrapsychic and thus needs a partner, a group, or an act of faith. What hinders the meeting of the minds is the analyst’s fear of his emotions and feelings, and the consequent building of barriers by which he finds protection from the fear. Although the analyst should be able to think even in the presence of fear, psychoanalysis as an institutionalized knowledge is of no aid in this regard. On the contrary, the institutionalized psychoanalytic knowledge can increase the fear, creating the condition for the common practices, habits, and morals that operate within the analyst, making him a strict and tyrannical Super-ego, incapable of tolerating those meanings, emotions, or ideas that dissent or diverge from the dogmatic assumptions and idealized patterns of the institution (p. 120).

The reader can here perceive the echoes of Bion’s own suffering under the rigidity and censorship of the Kleinian group. Borgogno, who has no difficulties in directly addressing this issue, also reports the opinion of Pathenope Bion Talamo –Bion’s daughter, who lived in Torino –according to whom the atmosphere that dominated the Kleinian group made the free expression of her father ideas and emotions very dangerous, indeed impossible (p. 133). As a matter of fact, in this period Bion lacked an intermediate, transitional and affective space. If the question “Who is killing whom?” summarizes the tragic element which characterizes the work of Bion, the unique answer which has to be found in this period is that the patient is the one who, always and forever, kills the analyst. Significantly, after having found the strength of leaving this group, Bion will reverse his position, recognizing that the analyst is the one who, sometimes, kills the patient with his too clever and brilliant ideas. Later on, he will come to the conclusion that the institution is the one, which, in the name of a pretended truth, can kill the individual. This final version of the tragedy would come from the *Cogitations*. Here, at the end of the “pathway”, we find a transformed Bion who, instead of disguising himself under the armor of the omnipotent and omniscient analyst, is ready to work with the people who turn to him, and really ready to learn from them

(p. 141). Thus, also Bion's pathway runs backwards, being essentially characterized by the undoing of all sorts of superstructures in which the personal and professional identity of the analyst is bridled and starched. I wonder if this Bion was influenced by Michael Balint and his view of the therapeutic process as destructuring and fluidifying the personality – and, via Balint, by Sándor Ferenczi. In any case, the author notes a strikingly similarity between the Cogitations of Bion and Ferenczi's Clinical Diary, at least in relation to their courage vis à vis the institution and their capacity to overcome the already known.

The convergence between the works of Bion and Ferenczi is indeed manifold. In the work of the latter we again find a radical reconsideration of the interpretative function, which is based on a relational view of the mind and of the analytic enterprise. According to Ferenczi, as pointed out by Borgogno, "What the patient desires the most is not a correct explanation, but to be enabled to feel 'how' the analyst has taken part in and overcome a similar turmoil and emotional crisis in the process of arriving at the interpretation" (p. 149, also p. 191). This statement must not be misunderstood as a sort of indifference for the "truth". On the contrary, it rejects a shift of the focus from the interpretation as a product to the interpretation as a process, which is motivated by a sharp analysis of "conviction" that is summarized by the following principle: "Conviction in matter of psycho-analysis is only to be gained through oneself" (Ferenczi, "The psychological analysis of dreams" 1909 p. 152).

This shift from interpretation as a product to interpretation as a process corresponds, in the works of Ferenczi, to an opening up of the analyst's attention from the mere content of the verbal communication to the "how" of the communication, in which the atmosphere, the encounter, and the body are discovered as elements which take part in the creation of meaning. Yet, this shift implies more than this. The new interest in the communicative processes implies, first of all, the acknowledgement of the patient's need to be recognized as an existing being. What is expected here from the analyst is that he pays attention to the qualities, which make the psychic encounter possible. Moreover, the analyst should be concerned with the effect on the patient of his words and silences, in order to understand "how" they have been experienced by the patient, and adjust himself in relation to the patient's responses. Finally, the analyst has, so to say, to track his own words, questioning "where" they have gone once they have landed in the patient's mind (p.62). It is by paying attention to this process that the conditions necessary for change are created.

"Psychic reality", according to this view, is "subjective and process-based" (p. 185), since it is about the becoming of a subjective experience from the hic et nunc, the centrality of the present moment from which the past and the future are continuously outlined. Moreover, what is positioned in this center is the patient's point of view, since the analyst makes use of "the verbal, preverbal and non verbal response of the patient as secret and hidden commentary on the analyst's attitude and mental functioning" (p. 155). In this regard, Ferenczi foreruns Faimberg's "listening to listening", according to which the patient's narrative is about the analyst's listening of the patient (p. 191).

Ferenczi's own "pathway" is well summarized by this shift from the analyst to the patient which, according to Borgogno, permitted him to resume his own analysis, carrying it beyond its limits, repairing the places where it was cut off (p. 204). This going back to the failures of his own analysis, resuming its breaking points in order to "heal the healing", is made especially evident by the Clinical Diary which, symbolically, represents a long dialogue with Freud – the analyst. Here, the internal barrier which obstructs the analyst's mental functioning is finally cast out and fully exposed: what hinders the analyst

from meeting the patient's mind, is the fear of the patient's pain and fright. If the analyst recoils from being emotionally involved, it is because he is trying to avoid the patient's suffering.

We are now in the condition to see what the searched "pathway" of psychoanalysis is really about and to grasp why it does not take us into another place, frustrating our desire to "progress", our wish to step out from the position of patients and leave the sufferance aside. If this pathway, instead of transforming us into superior beings, appears instead to lead to regression, it is because its aim consists in increasing our capacity to tolerate "the fear of pain and madness which belong to the involvement [in the relationship with the other]" (p. 209).

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